IN THE CLAIMS

Please amend the claims as follows:

Claims 1-46 (Canceled).

Claim 47 (New): A ceramic body with a high specific surface area, wherein at least a portion of the ceramic particles contains at least Si, Al, and Mg and has a needle-shaped morphology.

Claim 48 (New): A ceramic body with a high specific surface area, wherein at least a portion of the surface of the ceramic body is coated with ceramic particles that contain at least Si, Al, and Mg and have a needle-shaped morphology.

Claim 49 (New): A ceramic body with a high specific surface area in which at least a portion of the ceramic particles contains at least Si, Al, and Mg and has a needle-shaped morphology, wherein at least one selected from pores and elements capable of directly supporting a catalyst component is present on the surface of the ceramic particles.

Claim 50 (New): A ceramic body with a high specific surface area in which at least a portion of the surface of the ceramic body is coated with ceramic particles that contain at least Si, Al, and Mg and have a needle-shaped morphology, wherein at least one selected from pores and elements capable of directly supporting a catalyst component is present on the surface of the ceramic particles.

Claim 51 (New): The ceramic body according to claim 49, wherein the pores comprise at least one selected from defects in the crystal lattice of the ceramic particles,

microcracks at the surface of the ceramic particles, and a deficiency of an element that constitutes the ceramic particles.

Claim 52 (New): The ceramic body according to claim 51, comprising microcracks having a width not greater than 100 nm.

Claim 53 (New): The ceramic body according to claim 51, wherein the pores have a diameter or width that is not more than 1000 times the diameter of the catalyst ion to be supported and the pore number thereof is at least 1×10^{11} per liter.

Claim 54 (New): The ceramic body according to claim 51, wherein the pores comprise defects formed by the replacement of a portion of a constituent element of the ceramic particles with a metal element that has a different valence.

Claim 55 (New): The ceramic body according to claim 54, wherein the defects comprise at least one selected from oxygen defects and lattice defects and the ceramic body contains at least 4×10^{-6}% ceramic crystals having at least one defect in the unit crystal lattice of the needle-shaped particles.

Claim 56 (New): The ceramic body according to claim 49, wherein at least one element or more constituting the needle-shaped particles of the ceramic body is substituted by an element other than a constituent element and the ceramic body is capable of directly supporting a catalyst component via the substitute element.

Claim 57 (New): The ceramic body according to claim 56, wherein the catalyst component is supported on the substitute element by chemical bonding.

Claim 58 (New): The ceramic body according to claim 56, wherein the substitute element is at least one element or more that has a d or f orbital in electron orbitals thereof.

Claim 59 (New): The ceramic body according to claim 47, wherein the needle-shaped particles contain Si, Al, and Mg and at least one species from among at least Sr and Ce.

Claim 60 (New): The ceramic body according to claim 47, wherein the needle-shaped particles are cordierite.

Claim 61 (New): The ceramic body according to claim 60, wherein at least five unit crystal lattice units from the surface of the needle-shaped particles are cordierite.

Claim 62 (New): The ceramic body according to claim 47, wherein the aspect ratio of the needle-shaped particles is at least 5.

Claim 63 (New): The ceramic body according to claim 47, wherein the ceramic body takes the form of particles, pellets, a nonwoven fabric, or a honeycomb.

Claim 64 (New): The ceramic body according to claim 47, wherein the specific surface area of the ceramic body is at least 1 m^2/g.

Claim 65 (New): The ceramic body according to claim 63, comprising a ceramic honeycomb with a porosity of at least 10%.

Claim 66 (New): The ceramic body according to claim 63, wherein the porosity of the ceramic body is at least 30%.

Claim 67 (New): The ceramic body according to claim 63, comprising a ceramic honeycomb that has a coefficient of thermal expansion in the flow channel direction of not more than 2×10^{-6}/°C.

Claim 68 (New): The ceramic body according to claim 63, comprising a ceramic honeycomb that has a coefficient of thermal expansion in the flow channel direction of not more than 1×10^{-6}/°C.

Claim 69 (New): The ceramic body according to claim 63, comprising a ceramic honeycomb that has a crush strength in the flow channel direction of at least 5 MPa.

Claim 70 (New): The ceramic body according to claim 63, comprising a ceramic honeycomb that has a crush strength in the flow channel direction of at least 10 MPa.

Claim 71 (New): The ceramic body according to claim 63, comprising a ceramic honeycomb that has a cell wall thickness of not more than 400 μm.

Claim 72 (New): The ceramic body according to claim 71, comprising a ceramic honeycomb that has a cell wall thickness of not more than 100 μm.

Claim 73 (New): The ceramic body according to claim 63, comprising a ceramic honeycomb that has a narrow pore distribution width.

Claim 74 (New): The ceramic body according to claim 73, wherein at least 50% of the pore volume is encompassed by the distribution width within ± 1/2 of the value of the average pore diameter.

Claim 75 (New): The ceramic catalyst body according to claim 47 which supports a catalyst component.

Claim 76 (New): The ceramic catalyst body according to claim 75, wherein the catalyst component is a noble metal.

Claim 77 (New): The ceramic catalyst body according to claim 76, wherein the amount of supported catalyst component is at least 0.1 g per liter.

Claim 78 (New): The ceramic catalyst body according to claim 75 which further comprises a co-catalyst component.

Claim 79 (New): The ceramic catalyst body according to claim 78, wherein the co-catalyst component is at least one selected from the group consisting of lanthanoid elements,

transition metal elements, alkali metal elements, alkaline-earth metal elements, their oxides and compound oxides.

Claim 80 (New): The ceramic catalyst body according to claim 79, wherein the co-catalyst component content is at least 6 g per liter.

Claim 81 (New): A method of producing a ceramic body with a high specific surface area that has needle-shaped particles, comprising:

producing a ceramic body in which at least a portion of the ceramic particles contains at least Si, Al, and Mg and has a needle-shaped morphology, using a starting material comprising a compound of SiO_2 and Al_2O_3 as an Si source.

Claim 82 (New): The method of producing a ceramic body that has needle-shaped particles according to claim 81, wherein an acicularization additive is added.

Claim 83 (New): The method of producing a ceramic body that has needle-shaped particles according to claim 82, wherein the acicularization additive is at least one selected from the group consisting of lanthanoid elements, transition metal elements, alkali metal elements, and alkaline-earth metal elements.

Claim 84 (New): The method of producing a ceramic body that has needle-shaped particles according to claim 81, wherein the appearance of needle-shaped particles is induced by an acid treatment, an alkali treatment, or dry etching.

Claim 85 (New): The method of producing a ceramic body that has needle-shaped particles according to claim 84, wherein the acid treatment that induces the appearance of needle-shaped particles is a treatment with a weak acid.

Claim 86 (New): The method of producing a ceramic body that has needle-shaped particles according to claim 85, wherein the weak acid is a weak acid with a normality of 0.001 to 2.

Claim 87 (New): The method of producing a ceramic body that has needle-shaped particles according to claim 85, wherein the weak acid is at least one acid selected from the group consisting of an acid containing a carboxy group (–COOH), phosphoric acid, and hydrogen sulfide.

Claim 88 (New): The method of producing a ceramic body that has needle-shaped particles according to claim 81, comprising molding a composition containing needle-shaped particles into a desired shape and firing the composition; wherein the appearance of needle-shaped particles is induced.

Claim 89 (New): The method of producing a ceramic body that has needle-shaped particles according to claim 81, comprising molding a starting material for forming needle-shaped particles into a desired shape and firing the starting material; wherein the appearance of needle-shaped particles is induced.

Claim 90 (New): A method of producing a ceramic catalyst body, comprising supporting a catalyst component on a ceramic body according to claim 47.

Claim 91 (New): A method of producing a ceramic catalyst body, according to claim 90 further comprising supporting a co-catalyst component on the ceramic body.

Claim 92 (New): The method of producing a ceramic catalyst body according to claim 91, wherein the co-catalyst component is mixed into a ceramic starting material for the ceramic body.

Claim 93 (New): The method of producing a ceramic catalyst body according to claim 90 further comprising supporting a co-catalyst component on the ceramic catalyst body.

Claim 94 (New): The method of producing a ceramic catalyst body according to claim 93 wherein the co-catalyst component is mixed into a ceramic starting material for the ceramic catalyst body.